

Amendments to the Drawings:

The attached sheets of drawings include changes to Figs. 3 and 10. These sheets, which respectively include Figs. 3 and 4 and Figs. 9 and 10, replace the original sheets including those figures. In Fig. 3, 2B has been changed to 12B, and an additional 12B has been added. In Fig. 10, 4A has been changed to 41A, and 41B and 41C have been added.

Attachments: Replacement Sheets

Annotated Sheets Showing Changes

REMARKS

The drawings are objected to because they include reference characters 2B in "Fig. 4" (it is believed that the examiner intended to refer to Fig. 3 instead of Fig. 4) and 4A in Fig. 10 that are not mentioned in the description. In Fig. 3, 2B has been amended to read 12B, mentioned in the last line of page 7 of the specification and elsewhere, and an additional 12B has been added, as mentioned in the same passage and elsewhere. In Fig. 10, 4A has been amended to read 41A, mentioned in the specification at 11:3 and elsewhere. Also in Fig. 10, reference characters 41B and 41C, mentioned in the specification at 11:3 and elsewhere, have been added. Withdrawal of the objection to the drawings is respectfully requested.

Polypropylene has properties that make it useful for making masking members for protecting designated parts of articles during a coating process. However, as the specification of the application explains on page 1, conventional polypropylene sheets have poor elongation (poor ability to stretch). This makes it difficult to mold a masking member with this material by vacuum and/or pressure forming, especially if the masking member is to be used to protect a part of an article that has a complex shape.

Vacuum and/or pressure forming is advantageous for making masking members and other articles but produces stresses that do not arise in injection molding. In injection molding, the injected material is molten or nearly so and readily flows to assume the contours of the mold. But an article that is manufactured by vacuum and/or pressure forming of a material that is not molten involves stretching of the material. If the material does not readily elongate or stretch and the shape is complex, the stresses become severe, to the detriment of the resulting article.

It is no solution to this problem to heat a conventional polypropylene sheet to facilitate its molding into a complex shape: the softened polypropylene sheet is in that case apt to droop under its own weight, making accurate molding difficult.

The specification explains on page 2 that the problems of the prior art are remedied by providing a masking member made of a modified polypropylene sheet in which 5 to 30 % by

weight of polyethylene and/or ethylene-propylene copolymer is mixed in with polypropylene.

This makes the material much better adapted to stretching without so much heating, so that the masking member is easily and efficiently manufactured by vacuum and/or pressure forming the modified polypropylene into a prescribed shape.

This represents a significant improvement over the prior art. As noted below, the independent claim recites the key features of the invention that distinguish it from the prior art. Reconsideration of the claims is therefore respectfully requested.

Claims 1 and 4 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by JP 10-053748 (Nitto). Claims 2 and 5 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Nitto and further in view of JP 05154423A (Nagoya). In the view of the examiner, Nitto discloses all of the features recited in claims 1 and 4, and Nitto and Nagoya when considered together would have made the invention as defined by claims 2 and 5 obvious to a person having ordinary skill in the art.

The rejections are respectfully traversed. The claims are directed to a masking member made of a modified polypropylene sheet. In this modified polypropylene sheet, 5 to 30 % by weight of polyethylene and/or ethylene-propylene copolymer is mixed in with polypropylene. The masking member is manufactured by vacuum and/or pressure forming the modified polypropylene into a prescribed shape.

The invention as defined by the resubmitted claims is neither disclosed nor suggested by the documents relied upon.

Nitto discloses a masking tape or sheet made of (a) a block copolymer consisting of hard segments made of polypropylene and soft segments made of one or more kind(s) of copolymer selected from the group consisting of (1) propylene-ethylene copolymer, (2) propylene- α -olefin copolymer and (3) propylene-diene copolymer and (b) polypropylene. The object of the invention of Nitto is to provide a masking tape or sheet that is easily cut by a knife (cutter).

Thus, in Nitto component (a) is a block copolymer having hard and soft segments and

component (b) is polypropylene. In the present invention, the component (call it a') that is mixed with polypropylene (call it b') is polyethylene or ethylene-propylene copolymer, as opposed to a block copolymer having hard and soft segments.

Moreover, an object of the present invention is to provide a plastic sheet that easily stretches and therefore has excellent moldability for vacuum and/or pressure forming. Nitto's ease of cutting is not a consideration in the present invention. A person of ordinary skill in the art seeking a composition that provides for excellent moldability would not seek inspiration from Nitto's disclosure of a composition that provides for ease of cutting and contributes nothing to moldability.

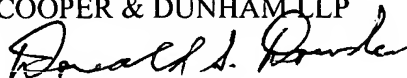
Accordingly, the rejection under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) is misplaced and should be withdrawn.

Nagoya, cited only against dependent claims 2 and 5, does not supply the teaching relevant to the present invention that is missing from Nitto. The patent discloses a masking member made of a plastic sheet in which an inorganic filler is mixed, and indicates that polyolefin can be used as the plastic. However, the patent does not disclose the composition recited by the claims of the application. Thus, Nitto and Nagoya considered together fail to disclose or suggest the present invention as defined in the independent claim or in dependent claims 2 and 4. Accordingly, the rejection under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) is also misplaced and should be withdrawn.

There being no further rejections or objections, the application is in condition for allowance; issuance of a Notice of Allowance is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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Fig.3

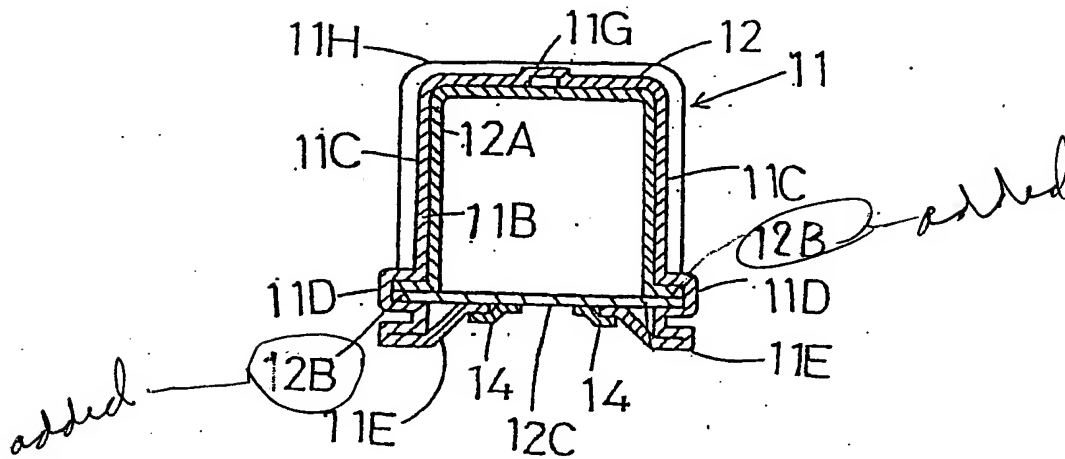


Fig.4

